

State of Alaska  
**Department of Health & Social Services**

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**NEWS RELEASE**



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**Applications for SeniorCare now being accepted**  
*New prescription drug and cash assistance program begins April 1*

(Juneau) –The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services is now accepting applications for SeniorCare, which is slated to begin April 1, 2004. Signed into law by Governor Frank H. Murkowski last week, SeniorCare will help Alaska seniors with prescription drug subsidies. “We want people to be aware that the income guidelines have changed, and some people who did not previously qualify for the Senior Assistance Program may now qualify for SeniorCare,” Anthony Lombardo, Director of Public Assistance said.

Seniors qualify for the Senior Assistance Program if they are 65 and older, a US citizen or legal alien, a resident of Alaska, plan to remain in Alaska, and have an income below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

Those seniors at or below 135 percent of poverty level, who are not receiving comprehensive Medicaid prescription drug coverage, have a choice to receive the new SeniorCare prescription drug subsidy of \$1,600 a year, or continue receiving the Senior Assistance Program cash assistance of \$120 a month. Together with the \$600 Medicare subsidy which begins later this spring, eligible seniors who choose the SeniorCare prescription drug benefit will have a combined drug subsidy of \$2,200 a year. Qualified seniors who are receiving Medicaid prescription drug coverage will be able to continue receiving the cash assistance of \$120 per month.

According to new Federal Poverty Level guidelines effective February 2004, 135 percent of the poverty level is defined as earning less than \$15,701 annually and having liquid assets of no more than \$4000, or if living with a spouse, earning less than \$21,074 and assets of no more than \$6,000.

Additionally, seniors between 135 percent and 150 percent of poverty level (those with an annual income less than \$17,445 for an individual, or \$23,415 for a couple) will receive a prescription drug subsidy of \$1,000 a year.

Applications for SeniorCare cash or prescription drug benefits are now available at offices of the Division of Public Assistance, at the SeniorCare website [www.seniorcare.alaska.gov](http://www.seniorcare.alaska.gov), and will soon be available at senior centers. Seniors currently receiving cash assistance from the Senior Assistance Program will receive information and application forms in the mail this week.

The toll-free telephone number for the SeniorCare Senior Information Office is 1-800-478-6065 (Anchorage 907-269-3680) and the Web address is: [www.seniorcare.alaska.gov](http://www.seniorcare.alaska.gov).

*For more information, please contact*

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## Frequently Asked Questions – SeniorCare

***Q: When will the SeniorCare prescription drug benefit be made available?***

The prescription drug subsidy will begin April 1, and it will be available until the full Medicare prescription drug benefits begin in January 2006.

***Q: Who is eligible for the SeniorCare prescription drug subsidy or cash benefit?***

The individual must be age 65, a US citizen or legal alien, a resident of Alaska, and must plan to remain in Alaska for the duration of the program. Those seniors opting for the prescription drug subsidy must also have the Medicare Drug card, once it is available, about May 2004.

Seniors with income below 135 percent of the federal poverty level (annual income less than \$15,701), and liquid assets of no more than \$4,000 will qualify for the program. Couples living together who are married may have an annual income of no more than \$21,074 and assets of no more than \$6,000. Seniors who qualify for the SeniorCare program and who do not receive Medicaid prescription drug coverage, will be able to choose cash assistance or the new SeniorCare prescription drug subsidy of \$1,600 a year (prorated). Qualified seniors who are receiving Medicaid prescription drug coverage will be able to continue receiving the cash assistance of \$120 per month.

Seniors with income between 135 percent and 150 percent of poverty level will also qualify for a prescription drug subsidy. Seniors who have an annual income less than \$17,445 for an individual, or \$23,415 for a couple, will qualify.

***Q: Are all my income and assets counted for purposes of eligibility?***

No. Permanent Fund Dividend income is not counted. Also, only liquid assets are counted. Liquid assets are cash or other resources that can easily be converted to cash. Liquid assets include cash, bank accounts, stocks, bonds, individual retirement accounts, money market certificates, cash value of life insurance, etc. A home, automobiles and other real property are not counted for purposes of eligibility.

***Q: My spouse is over 65, but I'm not. Do we have to count my income and assets as well?***

Yes. Eligibility is based on the combined income and assets of couples who are married and living together regardless of whether one or both is eligible to receive the benefit.

***Q: I live in an assisted living home. Am I eligible for the Alaska SeniorCare Program?***

Yes. Seniors living independently or in assisted living homes are eligible. You are not eligible if you are living in a nursing home or other institutional setting.

***Q: Will SeniorCare prescription drug benefit cover all drugs?***

No. The benefit will not cover over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, or any medical supplies currently not covered under Medicaid. This benefit will follow the current Medicaid formulary for seniors, so drugs normally not dispensed to seniors will not be covered under this program.

***Q: How will SeniorCare prescription drug benefit work with Medicare and other insurance coverage?***

SeniorCare will be the payer of last resort. Medicare and other insurance will be the first payer for prescription drugs, and the SeniorCare benefit will follow after the first benefits have been exhausted.

***Q: Will I need to pay to sign up for the SeniorCare prescription drug benefit?***

No. SeniorCare does not require an enrollment fee, co-payments for prescriptions or premium payments.

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***Q: Can I leave the state and still receive the benefit?***

It depends. If you are only leaving temporarily and plan to remain an Alaska resident, you will remain eligible, though you may not be able to use your benefit while out of state.

However, if you intend to change your state of residence, the benefit will end. Other states are not offering the SeniorCare program.

***Q: I receive Adult Public Assistance. Will I be eligible for the Alaska SeniorCare Program?***

You are eligible for the cash assistance benefit, but if you are receiving Medicaid prescription drug coverage, you will not be eligible for the SeniorCare prescription drug subsidy.

***Q: How can I apply for SeniorCare prescription drug or cash assistance?***

Applications for SeniorCare cash or prescription drug benefits will soon be available at senior centers, offices of the Division of Public Assistance, and at the SeniorCare website [www.seniorcare.alaska.gov](http://www.seniorcare.alaska.gov). Seniors who meet the eligibility criteria need apply only once by mail or online. The application asks for information about income and assets, and requires the applicant to supply proof.

Application forms for the new prescription drug benefit will be available April 1, 2004 at the same outlets mentioned above and available on-line through the DHSS Web site and at the SeniorCare website [www.seniorcare.alaska.gov](http://www.seniorcare.alaska.gov). Seniors currently receiving cash assistance from the Senior Assistance Program will receive information and application forms in the mail the week of March 9, 2004.

***Q: I am currently receiving the Senior Assistance Program cash benefit. How can I choose to receive the Alaska SeniorCare prescription drug benefit?***

You will receive information on the new prescription drug option before the benefit is set to begin in April 2004. You will receive a form asking your preference. You will simply need to indicate your choice to switch to the new option and send it in.

***Q: I have not yet applied for the Senior Assistance cash benefit. When I apply, how will I know if I've been found eligible for the program?***

You will receive a written "notice of award" informing you that you are eligible, and when your benefit will begin.

***Q: Once I begin receiving the Alaska SeniorCare prescription drug or cash benefit, is there anything I must do to maintain my eligibility for the benefit period?***

You are required to report changes in mailing or residence address, the death of an individual receiving assistance, or admission or discharge from a nursing home or other institutional setting. We may periodically review eligibility.

***Q: How long will SeniorCare benefits be offered?***

Anticipated to being in April 2004 pending approval by the Alaska Legislature, SeniorCare will bridge a gap for low-income seniors until the full Medicare prescription drug coverage begins in January 2006. The SeniorCare prescription drug and cash benefit will end when the full Medicare prescription drug begins in January 2006.

**Alaska Department of Health & Social Services  
Division of Senior and Disabilities Services  
SeniorCare Senior Information Office**

Statewide: 1-800-478-6065

Anchorage (907) 269-3680

[www.seniorcare.alaska.gov](http://www.seniorcare.alaska.gov)